U. S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

AFTER ACTION REPORT
2001 INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS CONFERENCE
Reno, Nevada
13-16 August 2001

CONFERENCE REPORT: The South Pacific Division and Sacrament District hosted this first Corps–wide Infrastructure Systems Conference. The opening session on the first morning included the viewing of the video message from General Flowers, which was well received and set the tone of the conference. After the opening session, the conference broke up into six workshops: Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Structure Engineering, Geotechnical Engineering, Materials Engineering, and Construction Engineering. Workshops focused on elevating technical capabilities and maintaining in-house technical expertise within the Corps of Engineers. Experienced engineers, researchers, and technical experts gave technical presentations that stressed technological advances and innovations, and lessons-learned in the engineering fields associated with the workshop.

The conference had 712 attendees that included 585 Corps employees, 100 exhibit representatives, 27 attendees from other agencies and organizations. There were 69 exhibit booths and 5 Corps booths.   The conference had 250 technical presentations, given by 288 presenters.

The combined Corps booths at the conference enabled Huntsville to get the word out to attendees about the value of PROSPECT courses and how they contribute to the overall training of Corps personnel. Nichole Gauthier did an outstanding job of coordinating Corps booth activities.

Funds generated by charging a registration fee were adequate to cover all costs associated with the conference.

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES: The theme of the conference was "Maintaining Technical Expertise in the Corps of Engineers". The conference promoted learning between people in the engineering disciplines associated with the infrastructure for the Corps military and civil works program. The conference allowed Corps personnel to network with each other and representatives of private industry that they would not normally have the opportunity to do. The conference far succeeded this objective.

CONFERENCE EVALUATIONS: Review of the evaluations supports the overall assessment that the conference was resounding success. 100 percent of the Corps attendees stated that their learning expectations were either met or were exceeded. Review of the vendor evaluations revealed that their objectives and expectations were also met or were exceeded. Out of the 69 vendors, only two felt that their product was

not appropriate for the technical makeup of the audience. The remainder of the vendors stated that they would participate in the next conference. Many stated that they would even like to participate in the planning of the next conference.

CONFERENCE POINT(S) OF CONTACT: Albert Sidhom, CESPD-MT-E, and James Truesdale, CESPK-ED

SPECIAL THANKS: Jae Kim, CESPK-ED-M, for designing and maintaining the conference website. Steve Freitas, CESPK-ED-M, Bob Fite, CECW-ETE, and George Lehtinen, CESPD-MT-E, for their untiring efforts to ensure that the technical presentations went off without a hitch. They greatly contributed to the success of the conference.

WORKSHOP PROPONENT(S):
Electrical-Mechanical Engineering – Robert DiAngelo, Robert Fite, Dan Casapulla and
   Robert Billmyre, CECW-ETE
Structure Engineer – Joseph Hartman, CECW-EI
Goetechnical Engineering – Jim Chang, CECW-EW
Materials Engineering – M.K. Lee, CECW-EI
Construction Engineering – Bradley James, CECW-EW

TOTAL TDY USACE ATTENDEE MANDAYS (AUTHORIZED/ACTUAL):
   Authorized: 550 attendees x 2.5 days = 1375 Man-days.
   Actual: 585 attendees x 2.5 days = 1463 Man-days.

LESSONS LEARNED:

• Provide more preparation time for setting up the conference. The host had only 4 months to prepare for this conference. Given this short preparation time, it was fortunate that people were available that could make this conference a success. The hotel staff and exhibitors indicated that this conference went extremely well given the short time frame to put it together. The host needs at least one year and preferably one and one-half years to prepare for a conference of this size. This needed time would allow for improved agendas, adequate announcement of the conference, especially to organizations outside USACE including companies and professional organizations, more exhibitors, appropriate program for spouses, increase out-reach promotions, efficient badge system, online registration, etc.

• Continuing Education Units (CEUs): This was a significant value-added feature for the conference. CEUs improved overall attendance, as well as participation at technical sessions. It increased the overall professional stature and credibility of the conference. Nearly half of Corps attendees earned 1.6 CEUs. Also, one third of the Corps attendees earned an additional 0.4 CEUs at special post-conference workshops, held on Thursday afternoon, 16 August.

- Exhibitors added great value to the conference. Exhibit booths, technical presentations and personal communications with the exhibitors greatly enhanced the technical training experience of the attendees. The exhibits added an overall professional dimension to the conference.

- Audio-Visual (A/V) Equipment: The task of bringing the A/V equipment and computers to the hotel was exhausting. Several of the computers did not have adequate video cards to properly show the power point presentations. This caused additional effort and time of the Corps staff, and jeopardizes the smooth running of the technical presentations. In future conferences, it is advisable to rent all conference equipment, A/V equipment and computers, as well as A/V professional services.

- Agenda: Keep the sessions synchronized rather than ending at different times to ensure that attendees can easily attend other workshop sessions. Adequate time should be given to the presentations while maintaining synchronization. Emphasize new technologies, innovative solutions, and case studies. Generic presentations by vendors were well received. Allow 10 minutes between sessions to allow adequate time for attendees to get to their next session.

- Having multiple disciplines at one conference was very beneficial. It permitted cross training and networking with professionals from other fields. Many of the attendees attended sessions from several different workshops.

- Improve the identification badge. Use large letters for the first name so that they are more legible. Make the badges non-flip type so that names are always shown.

- The announcement of the conference did not reach the targeted audience early enough, especially professionals within DoD, such as Army major commands, installations, Army engineering schools, U.S. Military Academies, Navy, Air Force, and other organizations.

- Longer breaks were beneficial for networking and making exhibitor contacts.

- Exhibits: exhibitors requested to have more activities in the exhibitor area, including mixer every evening, daily drawing for prizes, etc. They would be willing to sponsor and plan such activities.

- Provide equivalent access to all vendor booths. The arrangement of the booths caused low traffic flow in some areas.

- Wearing a distinctive shirt by the conference officials was very helpful in identifying persons who could provide assistance and information to the attendees and to the exhibitors.

- Web site for the conference was a great feature. Given more time, the district could have incorporated onto the website an online registration function.

- Presenters should follow the presentation criteria established by the conference host. The criteria should include uniform power point version, readable fonts, etc.

- Those organizations that have the capability to issue Visa Accommodation Checks should issue checks to cover conference registration fees. Once it is determined who will be attending the conference, the host conference team will coordinate with issuing authority within each organization to ensure checks are sent well in advance to the host district prior to the start of the conference.

- Provide a well-formatted agenda across all disciplines that allow attendees to better schedule and select presentations.

- Establish a deadline for receiving presentations. Allow sufficient time for testing and loading presentations on to the website and on to conference CDs. Many presentations were received late and caused extra work for the staff and jeopardized the smooth operation of the workshop sessions.

- Two-way radios were a great benefit. Radio frequencies were connected directly to the hotel service personnel to call for assistance when needed. A permanent base station at the registration desk would enhance this operation.

- Having the breakout rooms on a 24-hour basis was quite beneficial. It allows for preloading of unique presentations, continuation of session discussions, and after-hour meetings and sessions. Breakout rooms should also be available on the day before the conference starts so that the A/V equipment presentations can be loaded and tested.

- There should be a conference staff member designated to ensure a smooth vendor setup. Designated staff member should have a cellular phone.

- The conference budget should include contingency funds to pay for unforeseen expenses that always occur.

- 24-hour security was essential. It secured the valuable property of the exhibitors.

- The practice speaker room was well utilized by the presenters.

- Professionally made signage for directing conferees is considered a necessity.
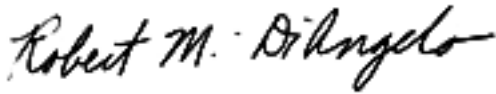
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE CONFERENCES:

- Conduct the conference on a more frequent basis, preferably once per year. By having the conference more often, a different and a more diverse group of engineers, on a rotational basis, would be able to attend.

- Form a Center of Expertise for Conferences. Designate the Sacramento District as the Center. CESPK has the experience and expertise in hosting conferences. The center
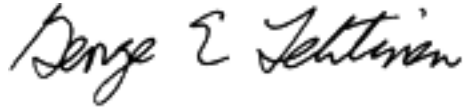
would provide consultation on hosting a large conference, getting CEUs, selecting appropriate facilities, and would collect lessons-learned, etc.

• Form a team for each conference to coordinate with the Center of Expertise. A representative from the district, division and HQ should form the team.

• Exhibitors: Promote more participation from exhibitors. Generic presentations by exhibitors greatly contributed to the technical training received by the attendees.

• Extend conference from 2.5 days to 3.5 days. This will allows more time for exhibitor presentations and visits, and for networking. The overall conference objective would be better achieved.

• Encourage attendees to bring business cards to give to exhibitors.

• Conduct the next Infrastructure Systems Conference in Reno, because of the relatively low cost, ease of access and quality of the facilities.

• Supplement ER 37-1-18, USACE Sponsored Meetings, 3 May 99, to include formation of Center of Expertise and conference team, as recommended above.

• Request that the attendees indicate the primary workshops of interest, as early as possible, so that properly sized breakout rooms are made available.

• Increase the out-reach activities. Invite local universities, professional societies, industry and trade organizations, etc. to participate in conference activities, such as, presentations, booths, and training sessions. Encourage media coverage.

• Extend invitation to the Secretary of the Army, the Chief of Engineers, elected representatives and others, well in advance, to attend and be keynote speakers.

• Conduct the conference early in the fiscal year when scheduling is more advantageous.

• Encourage the use of the breakout rooms during after-hours for special presentations, technical workshops, meetings, etc.

• Exhibitors should be charged a rate different than that for conference attendees. A single flat rate for companies should be considered.

• Presenters should bring enough copies of their presentations to give out to the session attendees.

• Have an organized system of archiving conference records. Records pertaining to the CEUs must be kept a minimum of seven years. Conference host should be responsible for keeping records.
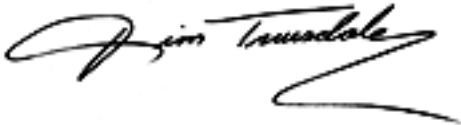
- The registration process at the conference site should be streamlined for those attendees who had prepaid the registration fees, i.e. express registration.

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